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Why Does the Implementation of Quality Management Practices Fail? A Qualitative Study of Barriers in Brazilian Companies

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Abstract

The implementation of Quality Management (QM) practices has been spread after the organizations have realized that such practices could increase competitiveness. Thus, QM is expected to improve customers' satisfaction and, at the same time, reduce non-quality costs. When these practices are implemented, some organizations obtain positive results, i.e. they improve their competitiveness and productivity, increasing their survival probability and superiority. However, many organizations can not reach their goals. In this context, this paper is the result of a research about the main barriers that cause the failure of the implementation of QM practices. The method of qualitative research was used in two case studies developed in Brazilian manufacturing companies followed by a semi-structured interview with an Operational Management specialist. The main barriers found were lack of support of the company leadership, lack of communication and also plenty of bureaucracy during the implementation. It can be concluded that the main barriers are more related to the elements that support the implementation process, than the inherent characteristics of each QM practice.

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1. Introduction

The stability of companies is in danger due to the changes they have undergone. Organizations must be more competitive and productive, and Quality Management (QM) aims to help managers to pursuit differentiation and superiority.

To attract managers, quality needs to achieve better performance results, cost, market share and profitability (Garvin, 1988). Quality can be analyzed in eight dimensions: performance, features, reliability, conformance, durability, serviceability, aesthetics and perceived quality. These dimensions are not used all at once, but in conformity with the strategy (Garvin, 1984, 1987, 1988).

Techniques and tools are very important for the success of an organization, because they provide high levels of Total Quality Management (TQM) and better performances. However, they are not enough to guarantee positive

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results; managerial commitment and an adequate organizational culture are fundamental tools for their success (Tari & Sabater, 2004).

Studies about the successful implementation of Quality Management have been conducted in several countries. Nevertheless, the copy of these examples of management does not necessarily result in the same success of the original implementation, as some features differ among countries (Carvalho et al., 2005). It is possible, for example, to adopt similar practices of TQM in different scenarios, since they have similar cultures (Tari, Molina & Castejón, 2007).

A practice may be successfully in a company, but not in another. The most popular practices and tools of Quality Management are: six sigma, failure mode and effect analysis (FMEA), quality function deployment (QFD), benchmarking, 5S, total quality control (TQM), stratification, Pareto diagram, Ishikawa, histogram and control chart. In this scenario, a question can be raised: What factors influence the failure in the implementation of Quality Management practices?

A study about barriers that impact on such a failure was conducted by Oliveira (2004) in Brazil. The author highlights that Brazil has potential to develop research in the quality area. Thereby, this paper aims to analyze the factors that mostly contribute to the failure in the implementation of Quality Management practices and serve of practioners pay attention to these factors.

2. Literature review

The implementation of Quality Management practices must be better developed in Brazil and its delay is justified by historic and economic reasons (Oliveira, 2004). Several Brazilian researchers have considered quality a differential for the sustainability and maintenance of companies (Carvalho et al. 2005).

For Quality Management to be considered fundamental, it must generate positive results for organizations, i.e. an increase in competitiveness assuring permanence and stability of the company in the market. Identifying the elements that constitute a Quality Management is a way of studying the barriers of implementation of Quality Management in the Brazilian context. These elements of Quality Management were presented by Rahman and Bullock (2005) under two aspects: hard and soft elements.

Hard elements are related to continuous improvement and consider organizations global systems. Several studies have focused on organizations that have obtained positive impacts on the organizational performance after the implementation of Quality Management practices. On the other hand, soft elements based on human factors, i.e. they take into account leadership, human resources management and strategic planning quality (Rahman & Bullock, 2005). They are related to the “management” of TQM, as it comprehends people, culture and improvement (Shahin & Debestani, 2011).

Studies have revealed that hard and soft elements can directly influence the final performance of an organization. Moreover, soft elements indirectly affect performance, because they create an environment that facilitates the implementation of hard elements (Rahman & Bullock, 2005).

Tari, Molina and Castejón (2007) found evidences of the influence of soft and hard elements on the quality results. Leadership was considered a key element to drive the TQM, and the techniques and tools of Management Quality were important to the context.

Fotopoulos and Psomas (2009) consider that both hard and soft elements are very important to Quality Management. However, soft elements are fundamental, because tools are an only way to improve quality and produce efficient results. The commitment of top management, employees and suppliers is also extremely necessary.

Shahin and Debestani (2011) conducted a case study in a Service Company to verify the relevance of each soft element to the implementation of TQM. The intangible factors have a significant relationship among themselves, but at distinct intensities. Leadership, relationship with clients, benchmarking and process improvement showed the best positive correlation. For the successful implementation of TQM, it is important to pay attention to these factors.

Soft elements can influence knowledge management, which is very important for the survival in uncertain environment. The application of soft elements of TQM allows the generation, acquisition and application of new knowledge, which is very important to resolve critical questions (Daud & Yusoff, 2011).

When information and data about critical factors of success are not clear, the implementation of TQM is jeopardized. Therefore, the study of soft elements (culture, teamwork and leadership) that promote tangible effects on TQM (growth, profitability, productivity and quality) is important. Among the soft elements, culture, trust and teamwork cause the most tangible effects on TQM (Lau & Idris, 2001).

Organizational performance suffers a direct influence from hard and soft elements. Practices of Quality Management can be analyzed in relation to the two types of elements that can facilitate the identification of possible causes of the failure in the implementation of Quality Management practices.

3. Methodology of research

This research has a qualitative character and emphasizes the individual perspective, as it is subjective (Miguel, 2010).

The hypotheses were developed from the literature review and tested in two case studies and one interview with an Operational Management specialist. According to Yin (2009), case studies should be used when focusing on current events and when there is no control over behavioral events. Therefore, it is necessary to use search tools like direct observation of events and interview with people involved in this issue.

The companies that participated of the case studies were manufacture industries located in Sao Paulo State, Brazil. One of them, is considered large and the other medium-sized and both have ABNT NBR ISO 9001:2008 certificates, which is important because ISO is a minimal reference of good practices of quality (Carpinetti, Miguel & Gerolamo, 2009). The hypotheses were assessed by specialists in Quality Management in the companies and one specialist in Operational Management, who has implemented practices in more than 70 projects.

Two hypotheses were tested aiming at answering the objectives of the research:

H1) The main causes of implementation failures of Quality Management practices are due to aspects of the hard elements.

H2) The main causes of implementation failures of Quality Management practices are due to aspects of the soft elements.

4. Results

Table 1 presents the result of the most relevant barriers pointed out by interviewees.

Table 1. Barriers in the implementation of Quality Management practices

Barriers	Case 1	Case 2	Interview with specialist	Number of occurrences	¹ Type
Bureaucracy during the implementation	✓	✓	✓	3	Soft
Lack of communication	✓	✓	✓	3	Soft
Lack of leadership support	✓	✓	✓	3	Soft
Complexity of implementation	✓	✓		2	Hard
Lack of training and employee development	✓	✓		2	Soft
Lack of time to implement more complex practices	✓	✓		2	Soft
Lack of sense of urgency		✓	✓	2	Soft
Lack of technical knowledge	✓		✓	2	Hard
Resistance to change	✓		✓	2	Soft
Lack of shared responsibility among sectors	✓		✓	2	Soft
Lack of links between quality, strategy and operations	✓		✓	2	Soft
Lack of implementation planning			✓	1	Soft
Existence of different subcultures			✓	1	Soft

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Barriers	Case 1	Case 2	Interview with specialist	Number of occurrences	¹ Type
Using preset models, bumping into macro cultural differences			✓	1	Soft
Lack of credibility of who is implementing			✓	1	Soft
Do not disseminate positive result			✓	1	Soft
Negative history of other implementations			✓	1	Soft

¹ Barriers classifies in hard and soft elements by Rahman and Bullock (2005).

The quantities of soft barriers are bigger than hard by Table 1 analysis. The majority of barriers pointed out by the interviewees had already been cited by several researchers, such as, Asif (2009), Beer (2003), Bunney and Dale (1997), Carpinetti (2010), Carvalho (2005), Harari (1993), Macedo-Soares and Lucas (1996), Mello (2011), Pinto, Carvalho and Ho (2006, 2008), Rad (2006), Rodrigues (1999), Tari and Sabater (2004), Tari, Molina and Castejón (2007) and Yang (2006). The most mentioned barriers are: “Bureaucracy during the implementation”, “Lack of communication” and “Lack of leadership support”. Thereby, it is possible perceive that soft elements are the most frequent elements that impact on effective implementation. Therefore, we can suppose that the evidences support more the hypothesis H2 than the H1.

5. Conclusions

Our qualitative study has shown a predominance of barriers during the implementation of Quality Management practices related to the soft elements. The soft elements are connected to human factors and management, as observed in the Table 1, e.g. bureaucracy, communication and leadership. Therefore organizations that seek success of implementation of Quality Management practices must take special care with soft elements.

However, this study does not allow generalizations due the limitations of the adopted research method. On the other hand, this research contributes to a greater understanding of the barriers to implement Quality Management practices. For future studies, it is intended to expand this research for more Brazilian companies. In order to have a broader achievement, a survey will be applied as research methodology.

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